PROPOSED BICYCLE TRAIL

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT

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PROPOSED BICYCLE TRAIL
SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT

Project CPA-CT-01-26-1037

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Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency
139 Boswell Avenue, Norwich, Connecticut

January, 1974

ABSTRACT OF REPORT

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2.	Author:	Regional Planning Program Staff of the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency, 139 Boswell Avenue, Norwich, Connecticut, 06360.
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SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

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Maurice Aron, a first-prize winner in "The New York Evening Telegram's Cycle Parade," June 6, 1896.
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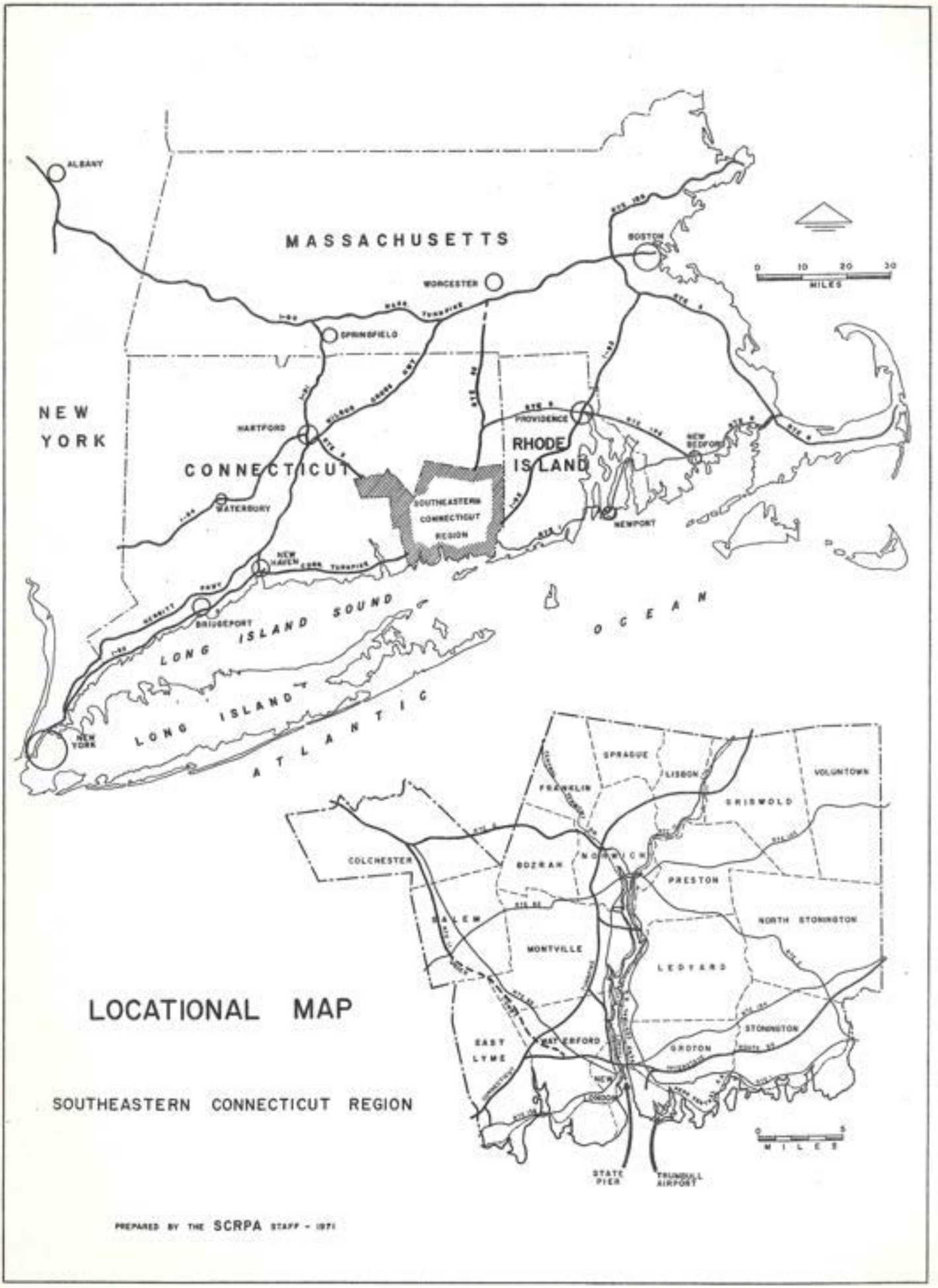


LOCATIONAL MAP

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT REGION

PREPARED BY THE SCRPA STAFF - 1971

PREFACE

The Agency hosted numerous meetings with the public last year concerning the creation of bicycle trails in Southeastern Connecticut. Discussion with these interested citizens at the informal evening meetings resulted in the initial planning for a regional bicycle trail to follow the old Norwich to Westerly trolley right of way. While the old trolley bed parallels Connecticut Route 2 in places, the linear site would constitute an "off-street" bicycle trail as it is not part of any present road surface or shoulder.

At the December 20, 1973, meeting hosted by SCRPA, town officials from Preston, Ledyard, and North Stonington declared their support for the proposed bicycle trail.

It was generally agreed that an engineering study and evaluation of the linear site by the Connecticut Department of Transportation or the Department of Environmental Protection is needed immediately. Determination of the range of facilities is needed so that an accurate cost estimate may be drawn. This report includes a general outline of citizen-SCRPA staff suggestions for bicycle trail facilities.

The report is a result of on-site fieldwork completed by a member of the SCRPA staff. Linda M. Simkanin hiked the complete 18 mile trolley right of way during October of 1973. 31 representative color slides of the proposed bicycle trail were taken, and are on file in the SCRPA office. Copies of this report, authored by Linda Simkanin, are available at the SCRPA office.

INTRODUCTION

This brief report describes a proposed recreational bicycle trail which follows exactly a portion of the old Norwich to Westerly trolley right of way. Although the original trolley line was 18 miles in length, for reasons explained in the report, we are considering only 7.5 miles as potential bicycle trail at the present time. In terms of ownership and present physical condition of the right of way, we feel that these 7.5 miles offer the greatest potential as a recreational bikeway for Southeastern Connecticut.

The portion considered traverses three towns - Preston, Ledyard, and North Stonington. It is unpaved, and would constitute an off-street bicycle trail. The property considered (see map page 13) remains south of Connecticut Route 2, is approximately 12' wide at most points, and passes through a variety of topographic communities including wooded upland forests, old fields, farmland, and dense freshwater marshes.

The proposed bicycle trail crosses four secondary roads with low to moderate traffic volumes. Recommendations for safe crossing of these four roads will be discussed in a later section.

Since the proposed trail follows the old trolley bed, it is ideal for biking as the established grade never exceeds 5%. (In general, it is recommended that bikeway grades not exceed 8%.) In addition, good drainage still exists on the right of way as the entire 7.5 mile length is considerably built-up from the surrounding land by the original gravel/cinder base. All ties and spikes have been long removed from the old right of way.

With one half mile exception in Ledyard, a Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P) transmission line follows the old trolley right of way. (The CL&P power line is a low voltage, single pole line, directly serving the village of North Stonington.) The wooden utility poles, half of which are the original poles installed by the trolley company in the early 1900's, are consistently located to one side of the right of way, and would offer no interference with the proposed bicycle trail.

The 7.5 miles considered as potential bicycle trail are owned by six different landowners. The CL&P is the largest single landowner, with 5.8 miles of the old trolley right of way. Their ownership extends from the proposed trail beginning at Lincoln Park Road in Preston, to, and including, Christie Pond on Lantern Hill Brook, adjacent to Wintechog Hill Road, 1/2 mile southeast of its junction with Connecticut Route 2 in North Stonington.

Five individual landowners own the balance of the old trolley right of way from Christie Pond to Gallup Pond at the junction of Connecticut Routes 2 and 201. Their five separate parcels total 1.7 miles of the old right of way.

As the first such recreational bikeway in the region, it seems appropriate that the proposed trail is completely "off-street", thus offering a maximum of safety, as well as aesthetic riding experience, to bicyclists. The trail would be open only to bicyclists and hikers. Motorcycles, motorbikes, snowmobiles, and any other motorized vehicles would be strictly prohibited from the trail. (Emergency vehicles or CL&P utility vehicles would be permitted on the trail.)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TROLLEY LINE

Chartered in 1903 as the Norwich-Mystic-Westerly Street Railway Company, and adopting a name change in 1905 as the Norwich-Westerly Street Railway Company, construction of the trolley line began early in 1906. By August, 1906, trolley service was provided from downtown Norwich, where it left Franklin Square, to the Hallville section of Preston. By November of 1906, trolley service was complete from Norwich to Westerly, Rhode Island.

In general, the trolley followed a southeasterly route to Westerly. From Main Street in Norwich, the trolley crossed the Shetucket River, traveled a few hundred feet on the present Route 2 road surface, and turned abruptly southward until it reached the present Norwich State Hospital area. From there it traveled along the present Route 2A road surface to the Hallville section of Preston. (A portion of the trolley track can still be seen embedded in a small section of Route 2A at that point.)

From Hallville, the trolley followed the route outlined in the map on page 13. At Gallup Pond in North Stonington, the trolley traveled in a southwesterly direction, following the present Route 2 until it reached the present Wheeler High School site in North Stonington. From there it traveled eastward to North Stonington Village, where it resumed its southeasterly route to Rhode Island. The trolley crossed the Pawcatuck River at Stonington, over what is presently referred to as the White Rock Bridge. Although the trolley bridge frame exists, the roadway has been removed, and cars crossing the Pawcatuck do so on an adjacent single lane, wooden structure.

In 1911, a foreclosure sale resulted in a rechartering of the trolley line as the Norwich Westerly Traction Company (the name by which it is best known today). The new owners added additional track to the popular Misquamicut and Atlantic Beach summer colonies.

In 1916, the trolley line was again sold, and consolidated into The Shore Line Electric Railway Company. By 1919, the Shore Line Electric Railway Company went into receivership, but continued operations until 1924. By 1929, the properties had been disposed of, and the Company was finally liquidated.

In many cases, landowners with properties adjacent to the

trolley right of way were given first option to purchase those trolley parcels.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED BICYCLE TRAIL

SECTION I: Gallup Pond, North Stonington to Christie Pond, North Stonington. Refer to map page 13. (U.S.G.S. topographic quadrangle Old Mystic.)

At the intersection of Connecticut Routes 2 and 201 with Ryder Road in North Stonington, the Narragansett Trail (a Connecticut Blue-blazed hiking trail) crosses Route 2 and proceeds west, passing south of Gallup Pond by way of the pond's narrow cement spillway. A wooden bridge with handrails would facilitate safe bicycle and pedestrian crossing of the spillway. Since the old trolley right of way lies just west of Gallup Pond, the Narragansett Trail head (entrance-exit) provides easy access to the proposed bicycle trail.

Gallup Pond spillway

At Gallup Pond, the trolley right of way bisects a large, cultivated cornfield. While the graded right of way is no longer evident in the cornfield, the CL&P poles indicate the location of the original trolley route. At the conclusion of the cornfield, 100'

north of the Narragansett Trail junction, the built-up right of way is immediately evident as it enters the woods; the utility poles are located on its south side. It is recommended here, that the bicycle trail skirt the western edge of Gallup Pond, and rejoin the right of way on the fringe of the woods. For the next few hundred feet, waist-high grasses, and sumac dominate the right of way. Intermittent streams and low marshy areas flank the hard-packed 12' right of way on both sides. After a few hundred feet, the right of way is choked with 6' high sumac, blackberry, and other stubborn, woody shrubs. Wintechog Hill rises sharply to the south of the right of way, and the intermittent streams, with associated ferns and other marsh plants, follow the northern edge. The heavily overgrown right of way, with the described adjacent land use, continues in this manner for about one mile. Also during this mile, streams pass under the old trolley bed through culverts.

In the last 3/4 mile of Section I, the right of way is a cleared pasture, fenced with barbed wire, and showing evidence of grazing cows. Oak and beech trees provide surrounding woodland cover.

The 1.7 miles of right of way described in Section I is under (five) private individual's ownership. The balance of the right of way to be discussed in Sections 2 and 3, is completely in CL&P ownership (5.8 miles).

SECTION II; Christie Pond, North Stonington to Shewville Road, Ledyard. Refer to map page 13. (U.S.G.S. topographic quadrangle old Mystic.)

A barbed wire fence separates the right of way described in Section I, from the section adjacent to Christie Pond. The right of way, which passes just south of the small, man-made pond, is well-defined and hard-packed. Very low grass covers the surface.

Lantern Hill rises sharply to the south of the old trolley bed, and the pond and associated Lantern Hill Brook wetland borders the northern edge. The pond is extremely picturesque, having associated with it several large glacial erratics, as well as a tiny center island dotted with cedar trees. Bayberry, Mountain Laurel, hemlock and red cedar contribute to the attractive upland cover, and Lady Tresses (orchid) and cardinal flower afford some unusual plant diversity.

The open, grassy right of way crosses the intact cement bridge over Lantern Hill Brook, and crosses Wintechog Hill Road about 1,000' from the pond. At this point, occasional cinders are visible in the beaten dirt right of way. West of Wintechog Hill Road, knee-high grasses cover the old trolley bed as it

passes along the chain link fence bordering the state rest-picnic area on Route 2. The high grass persists until the right of way crosses Connecticut Route 214 at its junction with Route 2.

Grassy portion of the right of way

West of Route 214, the trolley bed remains hard-packed and completely open as a 12' wide right of way for a little over a mile after the Route 214 junction. White pine and hemlock cover the gentle slopes flanking the old trolley bed. The Cedar Swamp occupies several hundred acres south of the right of way, and Route 2 is atop a high, steep embankment to the north.

Shoulder-high goldenrod, red cedar, and other woody shrubs dominate the right of way for the 1/2 mile preceeding Indiantown Brook. Route 2, just visible through the oak and beech trees, is some distance north from the old trolley bed. Wet, marshy areas of the Cedar Swamp line the southern border of the right of way.

Indiantown Brook presents the first substantial water crossing. Two large cement abutments are all that remain of the old 10' wide trolley bridge. Chain link fencing on either side mark the abrupt endings of the terra firma. The brook is quite wide, and the soils extremely boggy. A second bridge is needed to close the 10' wide gap. The level of the right of way is about 8' from brook level.

West of Indiantown Brook the right of way is again open,

grassy, and very hard-packed. While the Cedar Swamp wetlands prevail to the south, open fields and cultivated fields dominate the northern side.

About 1/2 mile west of Indiantown Brook, the right of way is used as a farm road by the occupants of a cluster of buildings located just north of the old trolley line. The right of way is an open dirt road at the level of the surrounding terrain, and flanked by cultivated fields and grazing land until its junction with Shewville Road. One hundred feet before the crossing of Shewville Road, a third bridge is needed to cross a 10' wide cow path (an open passage which allowed grazing animals to pass under the trolley tracks to another field south of the old trolley bed).

Portion of right of way used as a farmroad

The few hundred feet preceeding the Shewville Road crossing are among the most scenic of the 7.5 mile proposed bicycle trail. An attractive wooded hillside complete with glacial erratics and a stone foundation to the north, could provide an attractive picnic spot with a scenic overlook south over a cultivated field and streambed. The old trolley bed is raised about 3 to 4' above the surrounding level of the land, and is covered by low grass.

At the Shewville Road crossing, another attractive hillside rises to the north, seemingly studded with small glacial erratics, but is actually the site of a former quarrying operation.

SECTION III: Shewville Road, Ledyard to Lincoln Park Road, Preston. Refer to map page 13. (U.S.G.S. topographic quadrangles Old Mystic and Uncasville.)

West of the Shewville Road crossing, the right of way follows the extensive Shewville Brook wetlands for about 1 1/2 miles. The hard-packed, open road appearance of the first 1/4 mile after the road crossing appears to be used as a parking area by hunters and fishermen frequenting this part of the Shewville wetlands.

A large expanse of open water, followed by an old stone dam, spillway, and millsite, provide attractive scenery to the south of the old trolley bed. Private residences atop a steep embankment, and an open grazing field border the northern side of the old bed.

Old millpond along right of way

About 1/2 mile from the Shewville Road crossing, a fourth bridge is needed to cross another 10' wide cow path between two old fields.

Until the junction with Shewville Brook, the right of way remains fairly hard-packed, and covered with ankle-high grass, and goldenrod. Dense shrub and tree cover persist to the north of the old trolley bed (a large white-tailed deer was spotted here), and low, marshy areas of the Shewville Brook wetlands dominate the southern border. Evidence of extensive herbicide

spraying by CL&P (to clear the right of way of unwanted brush) was found in this section, and ahead in Preston as well.

Shewville Brook constitutes another major water crossing. A fifth bridge is needed to span the 15' wide brook. Massive cement abutments, including a center support, in reasonably good condition, exist at the brook. More chain link fence encloses the drop-off.

Abutments of the old trolley bridge over Shewville Brook

The open, hard-packed right of way continues westward to cross Mathewson Mill Road. West of the crossing, the right of way, flanked by dense shrub cover to the south (a ring-necked pheasant was sighted here), and open water to the north, proceeds to a second Shewville Brook crossing.

Similar cement abutments (three) exist, and a sixth bridge is needed to complete the (wider) 20' brook crossing. A very attractive view of open, marshy wetland prevails to the south.

West of this crossing, the grassy right of way is extremely built up from the surrounding wet lowlands for another 200'. At this point, the old trolley line makes its third and last crossing of Shewville Brook. As before, three cement abutments prevail over the rather wide (20'), and stony portion of the brook. A seventh bridge is needed at this point.

The Shewville wetlands and brook afford a lovely view south, and a scenic rocky pasture, studded with occasional red cedars, prevails to the north.

The remaining mile of the old right of way is very hard-packed and open, and crosses no more streams. The extensive wooded acreage to the south is part of the large Fish and Game property owned by the State of Connecticut. To the north, Gay Pond, with its wood duck boxes, provides an attractive open water view.

The right of way opens onto Lincoln Park Road where very limited roadside parking is available.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

FACILITIES

1) Bridges: Based upon the fieldwork completed, seven wooden bridges are needed at the points mentioned in the text to complete gaps in the trolley line-bicycle trail, and to provide a safe means of crossing for bicycles and pedestrians.

2) Picnic areas: Several suitable sites might be designated in areas near Route 2, or near access roads to Route 2. This would facilitate refuse collection from the receptacles as the State has to collect refuse from the two Route 2 rest areas in the immediate area.

3) Sanitary facilities: Suitable locations for such facilities include the two official trail entrances, Gallup Pond, and Lincoln Park Road.

4) Shelters: Primarily to offer cover from the rain, shelters might be coordinated with the designated picnic areas.

5) Signs: Nationally accepted green and white "Bike Route" signs are needed along the bicycle trail, and at the four intersections with secondary roads. Safe crossing of the secondary roads by the bicyclists can be achieved only by dismounting the bicycle and walking it across the street. Needed at the four bicycle trail-secondary road intersections will be warning signs for both motorists and bicyclists.

   Signs for motorists should include the yellow diamond-shaped (warning) signs indicating an official bicycle trail crossing ahead, and should be placed according to Connecticut State Traffic Commission instructions. Signs for bicyclists indicating the street crossings should be placed well in advance of the road-trail junctions.

Signs at the official trail entrances should clearly indicate that motorized vehicles are strictly prohibited from the bicycle trail, and include the trail length (in miles).

6) Historic, botanic, and scenic trail markers: The towns' historical society, conservation commission, garden club, etc., might be invited to aid in designating these areas along the trail.

7) Parking: Develop sufficient off-road parking at the two major trail heads, Lincoln Park Road, and Gallup Pond.

8) Resurfacing: Some type of trail resurfacing is needed for bicycle riding, as the present surface condition varies with location, and is highly susceptible to weather. (Most bicycle trail planning sources recommend that two-way bicycle trails be at least 8' wide.) Reconditioning of the surface would involve major brush clearing of the right of way, and to some extent, the area to either side of the right of way along the more dense portions of the trail.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Cost-estimate: A detailed engineering study (presumably by CONNDOT or DEP) of the linear site is necessary so that actual costs for developing the trail can be determined.

2) Easements: Since the proposed bicycle trail is completely on private land, easements would have to be drawn between each landowner and the body assuming responsibility for the bicycle trail. (P.A. 249 relieves landowners of liability if the bicycle trail is designated on their property, with their permission, and with no admission charged.)

3) Taxation: Assuming easements are drawn (rather than outright purchase by the State or the towns involved), Preston, Ledyard, and North Stonington Planning Commissions should designate the proposed bicycle trail land as "open space" to enable landowners to apply for tax reductions under P.A. 490.

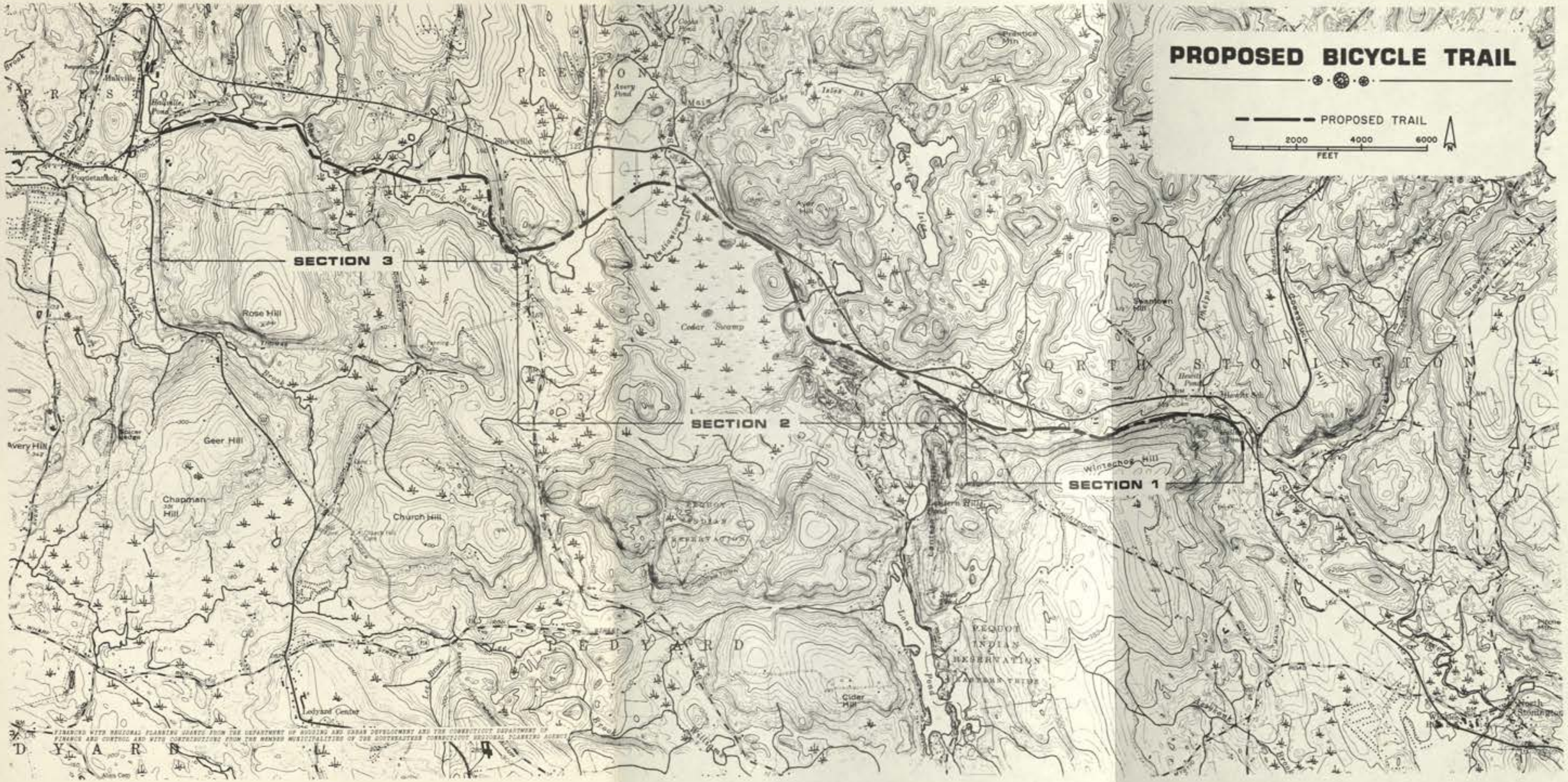
4) Manpower sources: Possible assistance in brush clearing, and shelter and bridge building might be secured from an engineering unit of the Connecticut National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the area Boy Scout Troops.

5) Trail Guide Handbook: Include a general trail description, location (map), mileages, estimated riding times, scenic and historic points, and simple flora and fauna descriptions of what is found on or along the trail.

6) Spur Trails: Additional connecting bicycle trails from other

areas to the trolley line-bicycle trail might be created simultaneously with this proposed trail.

One such suggestion from Ledyard town officials proposes a bicycle trail to originate at Indiantown Park (a Ledyard-owned town park with permit camping facilities) and join the trolley line-bicycle trail near its junction with Route 214.


PROPOSED BICYCLE TRAIL
PROPOSED TRAIL
2000
4000
6000
FEET
SECTION 3
SECTION 2
SECTION 1
PRESTON
NORTH STONINGTON
MILFORD
DYARD
Rose Hill
Geer Hill
Chapman Hill
Church Hill
Cedar Swamp
Winnechos Hill
Swantown Hill
Cider Hill
Lebanon Center
Avery Hill
Hollisville
Poquetanuck
Shewville
Main
Lake
Talon Rk
Long Pond
Stony Brook
Pequot Indian Reservation
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